

Lithuanians Protest, Wait for Gorbachev

Soviet Leader Arrives for Talks Today

By David Remnick
Washington Post Foreign Service

MOSCOW, Jan. 10—Tens of thousands of Lithuanians rallied in the streets of Vilnius today to demonstrate their support for total independence from Moscow on the eve of a crucial visit to the Baltic republic by Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Slogans on the banners they carried ranged from the brazen—"Gorbachev Go Home and Take the Red Army With You"—to the aggressive—"We Didn't Join the Soviet Union, You Grabbed Us"—as the boisterous crowd of more than 20,000 gathered outside the city cathedral to hear speeches and wave the red, green and yellow flag of prewar independent Lithuania.

Leaders of the grass-roots independence movement Sajudis said they expect much larger demonstrations in Vilnius, the capital, and the rest of Lithuania when Gorbachev arrives Thursday for the start of his three-day visit. Sajudis spokesmen said that they had refused a request by Kremlin ideology chief Vadim Medvedev to cancel today's rally.

Gorbachev's visit is aimed ostensibly at regaining control over the Soviet republic's Communist Party

organization, which split from the central party in Moscow last month. But more important, political analysts said, will be the Soviet leader's handling of the issue of Lithuanian political independence.

His performance over the next three days, as telecast nationwide on the influential evening news program "Vremya," will be a source of keen interest for independence activists in many of the Soviet Union's 15 constituent republics. Alexander Yakovlev, the party's foreign policy chief, has said that secession of Lithuania could lead to a "domino effect" throughout the country, and the prevention—or at least slowing down of such a chain reaction appears to be Gorbachev's top priority.

In advance of Gorbachev's arrival, Medvedev met publicly with Lithuanian Communist Party chief Algirdas Brazauskas and said that the Kremlin leadership plans a fundamental change in the relations between Moscow and the Soviet publics, but insisted that the continuation of reform required the "unity of the Communist Party." Meanwhile, Yuri Maslyukov, a member of the national party's ruling Politburo and head of the state planning committee, told factory workers in V

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Lithuanian children take part in demonstration in Vilnius yesterday. Sign reads "Free Lithuania."

Lithuania Presses Demand For Total Independence

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nus: "We are trying to hold this union together.... We are not your enemies."

The evening television news, which is watched nightly by at least 150 million people, gave extensive coverage to the appearances of Kremlin officials in Lithuania today, but failed to show any speeches at the cathedral square rally, where one speaker after another called for an independent Lithuania.

As the camera panned slowly over the dozens of flags and nationalist banners, the commentator intoned, "One could hardly call this political pluralism," and added that the program's news team found "other opinions." Recent opinion polls conducted by the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences indicate that 82 percent of the republic's 3.7 million people support the local party's split with Moscow and that the vast majority support full Lithuanian independence.

A Sajudis spokesman, Rimantas Kanapienas, told reporters that organizers of the demonstration scheduled for Gorbachev's arrival would try to avoid any banners offensive to him but that they intended to demonstrate the widespread popular support for independence in the republic.

Conservatives in the national party's policy-making Central Committee have described the situation in Lithuania as intolerable, and Gorbachev, as party leader, cannot ignore such sentiments. But if his history as a canny and pragmatic politician can be used as a guide, he will also be looking for a way to make the situation in Lithuania work for him, to harness it as a means of reforming the Communist Party apparatus and the union of Soviet republics, without



BY LARRY FOGEL—THE WASHINGTON POST

threatening the existence of either one.

The Baltic states of Lithuania, Estonia and Latvia have been in the avant-garde of radical Soviet reform for the past two years. The region is heavily influenced by its neighbors in Scandinavia and the rest of Europe, and only became part of the Soviet Union in 1940 through a secret pact with Nazi Germany.

The Soviet Union's new Congress of People's Deputies recently condemned the Nazi-Soviet pact, and the Baltic leaderships have all declared the treaties of annexation that flowed from it "null and void." One of the banners at the rally today read: "Lenin Recognized Lithuania. Stalin Took Away Its Independence. And Gorbachev?"